

travel tips


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Ontario

Ministry of
Consumer and
Commercial
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Whether it's the lights and excitement of a cosmopolitan city or a quiet stretch of beach on an isolated island, everyone looks forward to a vacation.

But whatever your dream vacation is, take the time to ensure it's a good one. A poor holiday is not only extremely disappointing, the time lost is irreplaceable.

Know your rights and what your travel agent should do for you. Keep in mind that much of the success of your trip depends on you. Book only with an Ontario-registered travel agent and read all informational material carefully.

The Ontario Travel Industry Act

Protection for your travel dollar is provided under the Travel Industry Act, which requires all Ontario travel agents and wholesalers to be registered with the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

The act also provides for a compensation fund composed of contributions from travel agents and wholesalers as part of the registration process. If you have paid for travel services but have been unable to receive them or reclaim your money, you may take a claim against the fund, provided the travel agent with whom you dealt is properly registered.

Claims on the fund must be related to financial insolvency of the travel firm and not the cost, value or quality of the holiday.

The regulations in place require accommodations to be provided as represented by the tour operator, full disclosure of all agency-booked services and costs, and prompt consumer notification of major changes in plans or price.

Before booking with a travel agent, ask to see the certificate of registration. It should be prominently displayed on the premises.

Narrowing the choice

The first step in planning a successful vacation is deciding what kind of a holiday you want and how much money you have to spend. Would you like to take a cruise or relax on a sunny beach? Are you interested in sightseeing or nightlife? Some vacation spots have a great beach and lots of outdoor activities but once the sun goes down, it's back to your room to read a book.

Do you want a well-established resort or one that has just opened? Don't expect a newly opened hotel in an out-of-the-way location to have all the conveniences or the polished services of long-established locations.

The Travel Industry Act requires new accommodations to be completed as represented in the advertising material. Do some research. If you know the country you are visiting has a lower standard of living than Canada, you won't be shocked by the living conditions or expect luxurious restaurants and nightclubs on every corner.

Ask your friends about possible vacations spots and for the name of the agency they used for booking. Were they satisfied with the trip and the arrangements? Firsthand accounts are hard to beat. But remember, you are hearing an opinion based on someone else's likes, dislikes and standards. Their idea of a good time could be quite different from yours.

Choosing a travel agent

Book your vacation only with an Ontario registered travel agent.

Choosing the right travel firm can make a big difference in avoiding problems; take the time to pick a firm that can meet your needs.

Some agencies specialize in certain destinations or types of trips. If you are planning a

mountain climbing trip to Tibet, an agency specializing in Caribbean cruises is probably not the best choice.

Ask questions

Don't be afraid to ask questions. The more you know about the destination and the specifics of the trip, the better prepared you will be. Find out if your travel agent has been there and when. Has the facility been inspected recently by the tour operator? What kind of sports or social activities are available?

Your travel agent can give you suggestions but only you know what you really want. Don't leave all the plans for a trip costing hundreds or thousands of dollars entirely in someone else's hands. Part of the fun in vacations lies in making plans. Get involved.

Booking the trip

The Travel Industry Act ensures everyone buying services from a registered Ontario travel agent is treated fairly. The laws set out specific remedies for common problems and it is the travel industry's responsibility to provide accurate information to customers.

Some travel agents charge a non-refundable travel counselling fee. Be sure to find out in advance if yours does.

Keep in touch with your agent

Obtain a copy of the brochure or other advertising material on your trip from your agent as soon as possible. Be sure to go over the material carefully with your agent so that you clearly understand what services are offered, the price and the terms and conditions of the reservations.

Travel brochures and advertising

All travel brochures and other advertising materials must conform to a number of regulations.

The price listed in a brochure is considered to be in **Canadian funds** unless the material specifically states otherwise.

If a minimum price is listed, the corresponding maximum or restrictions on availability must also be given. Taxes, service charges, membership costs and other fees must be spelled out.

Advertising must show, adjacent to the price, any terms and conditions affecting that price. For example, if there are a limited number of departures, or the price is applicable only to certain dates, or there are other restrictive terms and conditions, these must be clearly shown.

All photographs appearing in the advertising must be an accurate and current representation of the site. If the photograph was not taken on the site, it must be indicated. Similarly, an artist's sketch must be an accurate depiction if one is used.

Statements outlining such issues as consumer rights, refund policies, and potential differences in living standards outside Ontario must be included in promotional material.

Descriptions of accommodations must include location. If the brochure states the hotel is "ocean front" it must be true.

The brochure must also specify if any construction or renovations are under way, along with the anticipated completion date. Prior to departure, the travel wholesaler must verify that the accommodation is in the condition represented in the brochure and if the facility is still incomplete, an offer of a full and prompt refund or alternative arrangements acceptable to the consumer, must be made.

Rating guides

Pay attention to the quality ratings in your travel brochure. Don't assume the hotel with four stars beside it is the best. The tour operator may use an

eight star format or even a reverse order series. If you can't find an explanation in the brochure, ask your travel agent for clarification.

Know what documentation you need

Many countries require visitors to have passports, visas or other documentation. In some cases, international health certificates and vaccinations are needed.

All travel agents who sell out-of-Canada travel services must advise their customers of entry and exit requirements and international health requirements. Ask your travel agent for this information and if you need any special documentation, be sure to apply as early as possible.

Information on how to obtain a Canadian passport is available from External Affairs Canada. The number is listed in the blue pages of the telephone directory.

Travellers planning to drive in some foreign countries will need a special international drivers' permit, available from the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA). Ask your travel agent and contact a local branch of the CAA to find out if you need this licence or any other documents such as international proof of insurance.

Do some research

Remember that travel brochures can't cover all the attractions in the area or totally prepare you for every eventuality. Check the library for recent articles on travel in general. All major newspapers run regular travel columns that frequently report on common holiday problems and solutions.

Many sizable cities have at least one English newspaper. Pick up copies at a bookstore specializing in foreign publications. A look at what makes news in the area can help paint a clear

picture of the local culture. Newspaper ads can also provide addresses for local theatres or other facilities you may like to contact.

Cancelling the trip

Your travel agent must notify you of a price increase of more than seven per cent of the total package price, with the exception of a price change resulting from government taxation.

The agent must also notify you of any significant changes to the package you booked. For example, if the length of stay or availability of hotel is changed before departure, you must be given the option to change arrangements or cancel the trip with a full refund.

Cancellation insurance is available through most travel agencies. The travel brochure or advertising material must state the cancellation terms and charges, if any, and whether cancellation insurance is available and the cost. Be sure to discuss the refund policies and penalties with your agent at the time of booking.

Unforeseen health, social or business problems can happen. If you haven't purchased cancellation insurance you may not be reimbursed no matter why you cancel.

Get a receipt

Once you have made a payment to your agent for travel services, your agent should provide you with a receipt. The receipt should set out:

- your name and address and the name and address of each person on whose behalf the payment is made;
- the date the payment is made;
- the amount of the payment and the balance owing, if any;
- the business name, address and telephone number of the travel agent;
- the name of the company supplying the travel

services;

- the initial destination;
- the date of departure;
- where known, the name of the company providing the transportation to the initial destination;
- a brief description of the travel services purchased;
- whether or not the consumer wishes to purchase trip cancellation insurance; and
- the serial number of the receipt.

Your agent must inform you, and each person on whose behalf the travel services were purchased, of any changes to the arrangements. Each change should be explained and the options available with respect to changing, continuing or cancelling the trip.

It is also the responsibility of your agent to verify all information contained on your ticket(s), voucher, itinerary, information or documents before giving it to you.

Solving problems

With careful planning and the travel rules in place in this province, disappointments should be minimized. But there are always risks when you are dealing with something as complex as travel.

You shouldn't expect first-class service for economy prices or judge facilities or services against Canadian standards. Keep the state of the local economy and the country's level of development in mind.

If you do run into problems during the trip, first try to deal directly with the people responsible. Make notes and take photographs that may help prove claims. Keep receipts for any out-of-pocket expenses for which you plan on requesting reimbursement.

If you are not satisfied with the local response or

response from your agent after you return home, a **written** complaint can be made to the nearest regional office of the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations (addresses are listed in the back of this pamphlet). The ministry will look into your complaint and attempt to mediate a satisfactory resolution for you.

What to do in an emergency

If you find yourself in the middle of a major catastrophe, such as a revolution, war, earthquake or flood, go to the nearest Canadian Embassy or consulate. If there isn't one in the country you are visiting, go to the British or American consulate.

If you are stranded because your return travel arrangements have fallen through or your return ticket is invalidated because the carrier went out of business, try to make alternative arrangements yourself. Call your travel agent in Ontario if you can't resolve the situation. You may also contact the nearest Canadian Embassy or consulate.

The key to coping with emergencies is keeping a cool head.

The Travel Industry Compensation Fund

Always book your vacation with an Ontario-registered travel agency. That way, if your agency or tour wholesaler goes out of business, you won't lose your money.

The Ontario Travel Industry Compensation Fund is an industry-financed fund which compensates consumers who paid for, but did not receive, travel services because of bankruptcy or other business failure.

If your travel company goes out of business while you are outside Canada, money from the compensation fund can be released on an emergency basis to bring you back or to arrange alternate accommodations. Funds can also be

released to a maximum of \$3,500 per traveller to guarantee alternate arrangements for passengers scheduled to leave within a few days after the company goes out of business.

How to make a claim

To apply for reimbursement through the Ontario Travel Industry Compensation Fund, **write** to the Claims Officer, Travel Industry Act Office, 555 Yonge St., Toronto, Ont. M7A 2H6.

You must submit your claim form within six months of the cease to trade or bankruptcy of the travel agency. Give full details of the situation and provide a copy of your cancelled cheque, credit card or cash receipt to prove you paid for the travel service. Insurance premiums are not covered by the fund. The maximum claim per traveller is \$3,500.

Travel checklist

Once you have found a reputable travel agent and booked your trip, it's a good idea to draw up a checklist of things to do and items to pack.

- **PASSPORTS AND VISAS** — Anyone in need of a passport, visa or other travel documents should put that item on the top of the list. No amount of pleading will get you into a foreign country without the required documentation. Submit your application as early as possible.
- **HEALTH CERTIFICATES OR VACCINATIONS** — Find out from your travel agent whether you require special health certificates or vaccinations. Don't wait until the last minute in case you have a negative reaction to the vaccine.
- **INTERNATIONAL DRIVERS' LICENCES** — If you are planning on driving in another country, ask your travel agent if you need an international drivers' licence or any other documents.

- **HEALTH INSURANCE** — A short hospital stay in another country can cost thousands of dollars and not all medical expenses will be covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). It's a good idea to consider purchasing additional health insurance through one of the private plans operating in Ontario.
- **DATES, TIMES, FLIGHT NUMBERS** — Your travel agent should check all tickets and bookings for accuracy before giving them to you but it's a good idea to go over them yourself. The day before your flight leaves, contact the airline to confirm departure times and find out how early you should plan to arrive at the airport. For security reasons, check-in times for some flights may be as much as two or three hours before departure.
- **RETURN TRIPS** — Are your return travel arrangements prebooked or will you be required to confirm them?
- **IMPORTING** — Before buying anything with the intention of bringing it home, check Canada Customs regulations. The item may be prohibited or you may be required to pay duty.
If you plan to buy expensive merchandise outside of Canada, find out if warranties will be honored by a local branch of the company. Most are not and it is difficult to effectively fight for your rights across borders.
- **MONEY** — Traveller's cheques are the safest form to carry, but it's also wise to have some cash in the currency of the countries in which you will be travelling. Carry a small amount of Canadian cash, too, for use when you return. Allow for extra expenses. Even if your travel package is "all inclusive" you may want to have a special dinner, take a taxi or book a special sightseeing tour.

- **LUGGAGE** — Clearly label all baggage with your name and home address. Be sure bags are locked. Put a colorful ribbon or other identifying mark on your bags so they are easily recognized. Carry jewelry, money, important documents and all other valuables in your hand luggage. If you are taking cameras or other expensive equipment out of Canada, be sure to have the serial numbers registered with Canada Customs. Otherwise, on your return, you may be suspected of buying the items abroad.
- **HOME SECURITY** — Stop delivery of newspapers and inform neighbors and police of vacation plans. Ask a friend to empty the mailbox, do a bit of routine maintenance, and generally make the house look occupied.
- **PERSONAL CARE** — Carry spare medication, glasses or contact lenses with you. Carry all prescription medication in their original container with your name and the physician's name on the label.

Tips on packing

Find out what the weather is usually like during the time of your visit. Don't assume because you are going south that it will be hot. Most places have seasonal temperature changes and rainy months.

It is also a good idea to learn about the country's lifestyle and dress code. Shorts and bathing suits are not considered appropriate attire in many locations.

Most often forgotten item: toothbrush

Most needed item: jeans

Most enjoyed item: bathing suit

Most comfortable item: cotton T-shirt

Most missed item: bathroom tissue

Most longed for: soap

Most comforting: raincoat

Most often blessed: all-purpose stomach remedy

Consumer Services Bureaus

Toronto

2nd Floor
555 Yonge St.
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 2H6
(416) 963-0321

London

P.O. Box 5600
Postal Station "A"
Main Floor
80 Dundas St.
London, Ontario
N6A 2P3
(519) 679-7150

Peterborough

139 George St. N.
Peterborough, Ontario
K9J 3G6
(705) 743-8728

Thunder Bay

P.O. Box 5000
1st Floor
435 James St. S.
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7C 5G6
(807) 475-1641

Hamilton

P.O. Box 2112
5th Floor
Ontario Govt. Bldg.
119 King St. W.
Hamilton, Ontario
L8N 3Z9
(416) 521-7554

Ottawa

2nd Floor
10 Rideau St.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 9J1
(613) 566-3878

Sudbury

5th Floor
199 Larch St.
Sudbury, Ontario
P3E 5P9
(705) 675-4378

Windsor

Suite 627
250 Windsor Ave.
Windsor, Ontario
N9A 6V9
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